

VZCZCXRO7241  
OO RUEHROV  
DE RUEHTV #0738/01 0881116  
ZNY SSSSS ZZH  
O 281116Z MAR 08  
FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6074  
INFO RUEHKK/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN PRIORITY 0417  
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS BE PRIORITY  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 TEL AVIV 000738

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

H PASS TO CODEL BOEHNER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/24/2018

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [IR](#) [SY](#) [KWBG](#) [XG](#) [IS](#)

SUBJECT: CODEL BOEHNER'S MEETING WITH PRIME MINISTER OLMERT

Classified By: Ambassador Richard H. Jones, Reason 1.4 (B) (D)

11. (S) Summary. CODEL Boehner met with Prime Minister Ehud Olmert March 23. They discussed Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations and Olmert's concerns about Hamas-Fatah discussions in Yemen, Vice President Cheney's visit and the Iranian nuclear threat, the possibility of Israel negotiating with Syria and Syria's support for terrorism, the challenges posed by Hamas' control of Gaza, and Olmert's favorable view of European leaders. Olmert complained about Fatah's discussions with Hamas in Yemen, saying that the PA could not negotiate with Israel and with Hamas at the same time. He warned that agreement on another Palestinian National Unity Government would mean the end of the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. Olmert noted that Israel has a different assessment of Iran's nuclear program than that conveyed by the recent NIE, and said Israeli experts would brief Vice President Cheney later that day. Olmert said Syria's links to Iran should be broken, either by talking to the Syrians or by force. Olmert has sent messages to President Asad offering to resume negotiations without preconditions. Syria has responded rhetorically by expressing interest in negotiations, but at the same time continues to support terrorism and serve as Iran's ally in the region. Olmert called for closer U.S.-Israeli coordination on Syria, noting that if Israel starts to negotiate with Syria, there should first be a U.S.-Israeli understanding on the approach. Asked about Gaza, Olmert denied there was a ceasefire agreement with Hamas, noting that even in a "quiet" week, about sixty Qassam rockets had been fired from Gaza at Israel. Olmert warned that Israel planned to act in Gaza militarily in a way that would inflict serious damage on Hamas, although he added that the GOI is still considering when and how. Olmert praised several European leaders, including Angela Merkel and Nicolas Sarkozy, but he stressed that Europe was no substitute for the U.S. Congressman Boehner said the only true friends of the U.S. in the Middle East were the Israeli people. End summary.

12. (U) CODEL Boehner, composed of House Minority Leader John Boehner (R, OH), Representative John Carter (R, TX), Representative Pete Hoekstra (R, MI), Representative Jeff Miller (R, FL), and Representative Peter Roskam (R, IL), accompanied by Pol Couns and Congressional staffers Jen Stewart and James Lewis, called on Prime Minister Ehud Olmert March 23. Olmert was joined by Chief of Staff Yoram Turbowicz, Foreign Policy Adviser Shalom Tourgeman, Military Adviser MG Meir Klifi, Media Adviser Mark Regev, and MFA Congressional Affairs officer Yaron Sideman.

Concern about Fatah-Hamas Dialogue  
-----

13. (C) Noting that the CODEL had met with PA Prime Minister

Fayyad the previous day, Olmert asked for their sense of Fayyad's bottom line. Representative Boehner said Fayyad was trying to get his hands around the entire set of messy issues. Fayyad wants an agreement with Israel, but also realizes that he faces big challenges. Olmert asked whether Fayyad understands the security challenges. Boehner replied that he thought Fayyad understands the difficulties, adding that Fayyad is satisfied with the training that PA security forces are receiving in Jordan.

14. (C) Olmert praised Fayyad, calling him a "decent guy." Arafat was a terrorist, but Fayyad and President Abbas are genuinely interested in peace. Olmert then noted that one condition he had set for Israeli participation on the Annapolis process was that the PA not start "flirting" with Hamas again. The PA could not talk to Israel and to Hamas at the same time. Olmert stated that President Bush and Secretary Rice had agreed with him about not accepting a new

SIPDIS

Palestinian National Unity Government, and Abbas had promised him that there would be no negotiations with Hamas. Recently, however, Fatah had been conducting negotiations with Hamas in Sanaa. This was "intolerable," Olmert stressed, adding that Abbas had not even insisted on his own precondition that Hamas first agree to give up control of Gaza. Olmert said that no one had treated Palestinians more brutally than Hamas was doing in Gaza, recalling that Hamas gunmen had thrown wounded Fatah officials out of the fifth floor windows of hospitals. Abbas's overtures toward Hamas were "a risky game."

Stopping Iran's Nuclear Program  
-----

15. (S) In response to Representative Boehner's question

TEL AVIV 00000738 002 OF 003

about Vice President Cheney's visit, Olmert said their discussions had been "enlightening and horizon-broadening." The Vice President is an old friend who cuts to the crux of matters. Olmert noted that most of their discussions had been about Iran. Israel has a different assessment of Iran's nuclear program than that presented in the U.S. National Intelligence Estimate (NIE). The British, French and German intelligence services were all closer to Israel's view than to the NIE. Olmert noted that Israeli intelligence experts would brief the Vice President in detail later that day.

16. (S) The Israeli assessment is that Iran is still working on a weapons program. Within two years it may possess enough fissile material to make a bomb, as well as a delivery system. The international community must deal with the Iranian threat. The question was whether sanctions would be sufficient to stop it. The enforcement of sanctions required the cooperation of Russia and China. Olmert said he thought there was an opportunity to use the Beijing Olympic Games as leverage to get China to adopt a tougher position on Iran. If China did so, Russia would follow since Moscow would not want to be isolated. Olmert praised the work done by the U.S. Treasury Department to increase the financial pressure on Iran, noting that Israelis were impressed by the success of this approach. Representative Boehner said the latest UNSC vote on a third sanctions resolution helped keep up the pressure on Iran, and added that the U.S. should consider Olmert's idea about China. Boehner stated that Iran was also an obstacle to reaching an Israeli-Palestinian agreement, which he hoped could be achieved.

How to Handle Syria?  
-----

17. (S) Representative Hoekstra mentioned a series of developments involving Syria, including the still-mysterious September 9 airstrike on a site in northern Syria, as well as the assassination of Hizballah operations chief Imad Mughniya

in Damascus in February. Regarding the September 9 airstrike, Olmert responded that he had never said anything about it publicly, but he added that fuel tanks of Israeli jets had been found in Turkey near the Syrian border. Asked where Israeli-Syrian relations were headed, Olmert said this was an important subject and thanked Hoekstra for raising it.

Removing Syria from the updated Axis of Evil -- which Olmert defined as Iran, Syria, Hizballah and Hamas -- was in the interests of both Israel and the U.S. Syria now serves as Iran's forward base in the Middle East, through which Iran provides weapons and expertise to Hizballah and Hamas, as well as Iranian weapons for Syria itself. Syria undermines and manipulates Lebanon, and offers sanctuary and facilities for the Hamas leadership abroad in Damascus. Syria is also the main transit country for foreign terrorists going to Iraq. Olmert noted that there are two ways to weaken Syria's links to Iran, one of which is by talking to the Syrians.

18. (S) Olmert said that Israel has signalled to Syria that it is ready to talk without preconditions. If the Syrians respond positively, Israel and the U.S. will need to develop an understanding about Israel's approach. Olmert noted that the Syrians "know what I want" and realize that he is not trying to embarrass them. So far, however, the Syrian response has been limited to some public statements affirming Syria's desire to negotiate, but meanwhile Syria is continuing to provide "aggressive support" to Hizballah and Hamas. Noting that it was the fortieth day following the killing of Mughniya, Olmert said Hizballah had sent clear signals about an impending "retaliation" while Syria was stepping up its supply of weapons to Hizballah. If Hizballah acted from Lebanon, Syria would be directly implicated.

19. (S) Olmert said Syrian behavior raised questions about whether it might be best to confront Syria rather than try to negotiate. Israel would prefer negotiations, but only if Israel and the U.S. would benefit. It remained to be seen whether it would be possible to convince Syria to change its approach to Lebanon, Iran, terrorism and Iraq. Representative Hoekstra asked whether Bashar Al-Asad was firmly in charge of Syria. Olmert responded that Bashar was in full control. "Bashar is no dummy," Olmert commented, since he decided not to respond to the September 9 "event." Syria's mobile missile systems were on full alert, but Bashar had decided not to order them to fire. "That took discipline," Olmert observed.

How to Get Hamas Out of Gaza?

-----  
TEL AVIV 00000738 003 OF 003

110. (S) Representative Hoekstra asked Olmert whether Israel had a plan for getting Hamas out of Gaza. Olmert replied that Israel would not tolerate the continued shooting of rockets from Gaza. Israel will act in Gaza, in a way that will cause "great pain" to Hamas. Israel may not be able to destroy Hamas in Gaza, but it can hurt them badly enough that they will be forced to reconsider their actions. Representative Boehner asked about the basis for the relative calm in terms of rocket fire over the past week. Olmert responded that there was no ceasefire with Hamas; more than 60 rockets had been fired at Israel during the past "quiet" week. He asked the CODEL to think of Dayton, Ohio, a city about the same size as Ashkelon. Two hundred and fifty thousand Israelis were living in the area now within Grad rocket range of Gaza.

111. (S) Three weeks earlier, according to Olmert, the IDF had penetrated Gaza with ground forces and killed about 120 Hamas members, so Hamas needed to recuperate. Hamas was using the current quiet to smuggle in more Grads and to build rocket launching sites in parts of Gaza from which they had not previously launched rockets. This was an "old pattern" in which Hamas signals a desire for quiet and then starts firing the rockets again when it suits them, for example in

"retaliation" for IDF counter-terrorism operations in the West Bank. This "old pattern" would continue until Israel "punishes them in a more serious way." Olmert said that "when and how" the military operation would be conducted had not yet been decided, but he stressed that he wanted the CODEL to understand Israel's actions when they happen.

New Era in Israel's Relations with Europe  
-----

¶12. (C) Representative Roskam asked about Israel's relations with Europe. Olmert replied that Chancellor Merkel had just visited Israel, and she was a "real friend." Merkel was accompanied by eight cabinet ministers and they signed four bilateral agreements. President Sarkozy now wants to visit Israel with an even bigger delegation than Merkel's. Gordon Brown is also a "good guy," and Berlusconi may return to power in Italy. Israel also has good relations with Denmark, Holland, and Austria. The current group of European leaders is a different bunch than those President Bush had to deal with at the time of the invasion of Iraq. Olmert then added, "but at the end of the day, it's the U.S. that counts." Representative Boehner responded that the Israeli people are the only true friends of the United States in the Middle East. Boehner said he understood the difficulties in Gaza and the challenges of reaching an agreement with the PA. An agreement with Syria might be easier to achieve. Olmert said he agreed, adding that peace was always Israel's priority, but Israel also had to be prepared for other eventualities.

¶13. (U) CODEL Boehner did not have the opportunity to clear this message.

\*\*\*\*\*  
Visit Embassy Tel Aviv's Classified Website:  
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/telaviv>

You can also access this site through the State Department's  
Classified SIPRNET website.  
\*\*\*\*\*  
JONES